

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 DAMASC 07019 111551Z
ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5580
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AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T DAMASCUS 7019

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, MOPS, LE, IS, US, PLO
SUBJECT: SOUTH LEBANON

REF: (A) STATE 269545, (B) JERUSALEM 1825

1. MET ACTING FONMIN AL-KHANI MORNING NOVEMBER 11 TO PROVIDE HIM SUBSTANCE OF ISRAELI RESPONSE (JERUSALEM REFTEL). HE TOOK CAREFUL NOTES.
2. AL-KHANI, NORMALLY THE MOST RESTRAINED AND URBANE OF SYRIA'S SENIOR DIPLOMATS, SPOKE HARSHLY OF THE ISRAELI AIR RAIDS. HE FOUND PUBLIC U.S. COMMENTS ABOUT THE RAIDS TOO WEAK IN CRITICISM OF ISRAEL AND PREDICTED THAT ISRAEL WOULD INTERPRET OUR POSTURE AS ENCOURAGEMENT TO REPEAT THEIR ATTACK AT SIMILAR LEVEL OF DESTRUCTIVENESS GIVEN ANY FURTHER PROVOCATION.

3. AL-KHANI THEN SAID HE WAS PARTICULARLY CONCERNED AT
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HOW MUCH POWER TO UPSET EVENTS REMAIN IN THE HANDS OF "A FEW MAD MEN" SUCH AS MAJOR HADDAD. REPLIED, AS I HAD IN SIMILAR EXCHANGE WITH KHADDAM NOVEMBER 9, THAT THERE NO PROOF WHO HAD LAUNCHED THE KATYUSHA ROCKETS, ALTHOUGH WE ASSUMED IT WAS A PALESTINIAN GROUP. AS AMBASSADOR LEWIS' MESSAGE CLEAR, WE WERE URGING THE ISRAELIS EXERT MORE CONTROL OVER HADDAD AND HIS COLLEAGUES. ASKED IF WE

COULD EXPECT THE SAME OF THE PLO, AL-KHANI PROTESTED THE PLO WAS NOT IN POSITION TO CONTROL EVERY METER IN SOUTH LEBANON. I SAID IT NONETHELESS WOULD BE EXTREMELY USEFUL IN THE PRESENT ATMOSPHERE IF THE PLO MADE ITS POSITION CLEAR THAT IT OPPOSED INCIDENTS SUCH AS THE KATYUSHA ATTACKS ON NAHARIYYA AND CONTINUED TO SEEK RAPID IMPLEMENTATION OF SHTAURA AGREEMENT.

4. ASSAD, I OBSERVED, HAD SPENT SIX HOURS YESTERDAY WITH ARAFAT FAHHOUM AND MEMBERS OF PLO EXCOM. REQUESTED I BE ADVISED

WHAT POSITION THE PLO LEADERSHIP HAD TAKEN DURING THAT MEETING CONCERNING IMPLEMENTATION OF SHTAURA III. I ASSUMED THAT THE LATEST BORDER INCIDENTS HAD NOT CHANGED THE PRESIDENT'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS SHTAURA BUT I WAS NO MEANS SURE THAT THIS WAS THE CASE WITH THE PLO. ALGAKHANI SAID HE HAD NOT ATTENDED YESTERDAY'S MEETING BUT WOULD ENDEAVOR TO GET ME A READING. (COMMENT: THE OTHER SYRIANS IDENTIFIED AS HAVING ATTENDED WITH ASSAD WERE KHADDAM, AIR FORCE CHIEF NAJI JAMIL AND COS SHIHABI. I AM TRYING TO CONTACT SHIHABI.)

5. AL-KHANI SAID HE HAD TWO FURTHER OBSERVATIONS. THE INTENSITY OF THE ATTACK HAD THE POLITICAL AIM OF TERRORIZING THE CIVILIAN POPULATION AND FORCING EVACUATION OF THE TERRITORY ALONG THE SOUTHERN BORDER. THE NOV 9 RAIDS
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WERE BUT THE LATEST MANIFESTATION OF ISRAELI TACTICS BEGUN AT DEIR YASIN AND CONTINUED DURING THE 1948 AND 1967 WARS AIMED AT CLEARING TERRITORY FOR EVENTUAL ISRAELI OCCUPATION. I SAID THERE IO EVIDENCE WHATSOEVER THIS WAS THE ISRAELI INTENTION; AS I HAD JUST RECOUNTED TO HIM, BEGIN HAD FIRMLY ASSURED US ISRAEL DOES NOT RPT NOT WANT LEBANESE TERRITORY. AL-KHANI REPLIED WE SHOULD NOT ACCEPT SUCH ASSURANCES AT FACE VALUE.

6. SECONDLY, AL-KHANI OBSERVED, THE ISRAELI BOMBINGS WOULD ADVERSELY INFLUENCE ANY ARAB LEADER CONTEMPLATING ATTENDING GENEVA CONFERENCE. ISRAELI RESPONSE TO WHAT WAS OBVIOUSLY SMALL PROVOCATION STAGED BY INDIVIDUALS, OR AT MOST BY A FRINGE ELEMENT, HAD BEEN OF SUCH MAGNITUDE AS TO REINFORCE ARAB SUSPICIONS THAT THEY ARE BEING "BOMBED TO GENEVA" WHERE THEY WOULD BE EXPECTED TO CAPITULATE.

7. IN TAKING LEAVE, I AGAIN URGED I BE BRIEFED ON ASSAD-PLO NOV 10 MEETING AS IT BOREON SHTAURA AND CROSS BORDER INCIDENTS. MURPHY

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